

Anna Burai interviews Chris Korda for Vakuu Magazine

This is a partial transcript of an audio recording made on June 24, 2022. It has been edited for clarity.

AB: Honk, honk if you...

CK: Honk if you need an abortion. If there was ever a day when...

AB: Oh.

CK: I was making that sticker back in the nineties.

AB: And you're bringing them back or?

CK: I think today is the day to post it. It needs to be posted today.

AB: Very nice.

CK: I don't have one with me, so I put my curator to work on that project. But anyway, where were we? Back in the day, a lot of the early output from me was very ironic and very sarcastic, and that was appropriate for its time. It was a kind of culture jamming. It was very Dadaistic, to have a song the whole lyrics of which consist of buy, buy more, consume, be happy, and so on. It has a kind of childish punk quality. It's what you'd expect from an enfant terrible, which is more or less what I was, and it's consistent. The whole first album, *Six Billion Humans Can't Be Wrong*, is full of stuff like that. Eat, eat, eat, eat, flesh, flesh, flesh, flesh. The way it uses words is very punk, and it was influenced by all that punk stuff. Situationism. But after that hiatus, when I came back with *Apologize to the Future*, I had a completely different idea. My idea was to just tell people the truth, and I did so, at great length, and to the point that it earned me the title "The Bob Dylan of Climate Change." And I did it in rhyme! I should get points for rhyming as well. It was a different type of thing. But I guess the point I was just trying to make is that I had those kinds of thorough opinions and concepts from the beginning, I just chose to express them differently.

AB: What changed in the way you addressed them? Because for example, you mentioned it's very punk, right. Punk always represents a frustration of a given situation. What you're doing now is not reacting at a situation, but more putting yourself out there, being like, this is my truth, or this is the truth, you know what I mean?

CK: The early stuff was more impressionistic, but now I am being more concrete, and that's mostly a change in tactics due to the changed situation. The change in the situation is that thirty years have transpired, and during those thirty years, much of what I predicted would happen did in fact happen.

AB: What were your predictions?

CK: We predicted that climate change was going to become a major force and was going to completely alter human civilization, and that happened. We predicted that the population would continue to increase, and it did. CO2 would continue to accrue in the atmosphere, and it did. None of this was, by the way, all that difficult to predict. I don't have a crystal ball, I'm not Nostradamus. I just go to the

trouble to read sources that the average person might find tiresome or too difficult to read. I read scientific sources and it's all right there, and it's been right there all along. Remember, climate change has only been a secret for morons. People who were well-educated knew about it back as far back as the beginning of the 20th century. I knew about it as a child because there were articles about it in the New York Times in the 1970s.

AB: What do you think of modern climate change deniers?

CK: I think they're imbeciles, but I think it's not worth spending any time on them. It's just one of the long list of problems. Stupidity has been with us all along. To the extent that humanity is getting dumber again, then of course we have no chance to meet the fate that's rapidly rising up against us. We could only meet that fate with unified action. It would require tremendous coordination. Humanity would have to agree, and that's the last thing we're in any danger of doing, about almost anything.

AB: Do you think humanity is able to agree?

CK: It looked like that in the 1960s and seventies. The sixties period was a high water mark for international cooperation. The Vietnam war and the Korean war notwithstanding, and some other ugly examples, in general, a lot of progress was made towards defining what the goals were, for everyone. I mentioned the UN charter, the UN declaration of human rights was an enormous step forward. And it was a response to the chaos of the two world wars and the Holocaust. Nobody wanted to repeat that history, and there was a real danger that we were going to repeat that history, with the hydrogen bomb, and that was clearly going to be game over for humanity. So a lot of smart minds were put to work trying to figure out how to reorganize society, so we could pacify people.

AB: What do you think about a lot of modern, I don't even want to call it climate activism, but it's often the responsibility for taking care of the environment, for protecting the environment, is often pushed onto individual consumers. The notion that there is no ethical consumption under capitalism. Why do you think of people who, or where do you see responsibility? In the individuals, or is it more of a broader, economical.

CK: Even corporations are made of individuals. So it's not a simple question, it's complex. There isn't one right answer. Individuals need to accept reality, and corporations need to accept reality. We all need to agree about what the goal is. And the goal had better be humanity becoming a long-lived species. And if that's not the goal, then we won't be one. All of this is just sort of at the level of child's play now. It seems obvious to me, but apparently it isn't obvious to most people, but then I spend a lot of my time reading exoplanet biology and astrobiology. And what I've learned from my studies in astrobiology is that the experiment with intelligence that we're conducting here on earth has likely been performed over and over again throughout the universe with similar results. The deep psychological problems are these: one, any species that became radically self-aware would tend towards hubris. Hubris is overconfidence.

Such a species would tend to feel omnipotent and omniscient, like a God, and understandably so, because compared to its fellow animals, it might as well be a God. Compared to the other animals on earth, we are godlike. We build mobile phones, we fly through the air, we do impossible things. And so it's not surprising that it gets to us a bit. It goes to our head and the result of it is what the financial analysts so charmingly call irrational exuberance. It's a stock market term, but it has a longer history. We exhibit irrational exuberance. We can't imagine that it could go wrong. We think we're too big to fail, but

the history of evolution counsels exactly the reverse: the bigger it is, the more likely it is to fail. It's our refusal to accept limits that dooms us to failure.

But that's all hard for human beings to see, because we're caught up in our irrational exuberance, and the fuel that was like gasoline on the fire of irrational exuberance, was of course our discovery of fossil carbon. As long as industrial civilization was fueled by wood, there were going to be limits to our exuberance, but once we figured out that we could exploit first coal and then oil, and then figured out how much of it there was, you just know we were going to have a wild party, and that's been the plan. We're still on point one. Then we get to a deep ethical question. Whoever said that the goal was longevity, the longevity of civilization? I never saw that written down anywhere, except maybe now it's written down in the UN charter, but nobody ever reads it.

You never even heard of it. Right? Whoever heard of that. So it's just some obscure little detail that some diplomats agreed to, but the average person didn't agree to that. And the rich people didn't agree to that. Elon Musk certainly doesn't agree to that. As far as they're concerned, the goal is to have a super wild party for the rich. And if that's the goal, then we actually don't need to change anything. We've got exactly the right system of government for that. That's what neoliberalism is. Neoliberalism is the perfect system of government for maximizing fantastic consumption by the super wealthy. They all get to have huge yachts, and they can sodomize underage girls on their private islands. It's perfect for them. Think of Jeffrey Epstein. You know, he's like the poster boy for that worldview. It's all about the Lolita Express.

That's how the super wealthy envision the world. The rules don't apply to them. And it comes as a big shock to guys like Jeffrey Epstein when they suddenly find themselves in a prison cell like the rest of us, because they thought they were gods. They thought they were superhumans. And in a way they were. As long as money buys guns, that's going to continue to be the case. So that's the first problem.

But the second problem is that it's looking like another deep problem that any super intelligent species would confront is that one of the things that an intelligent species, in the process of becoming self-aware, will grasp, is its own mortality. And it would appear that we are not psychologically well-suited by our original evolutionary experience to handle the certainty of death. That this is a big problem for us. We exhibit all kinds of bad symptoms around it, like religion and other things, other aberrations, basically most people find it hard to accept that you live your life, and it's a one way journey. You buy your ticket, you take the ride and then you're dead, and nobody hears from you ever again. That's it. You're pushing up daisies, you are fertilizing flowers from a pine box, and that's the end. Half the people in the world don't believe that.

AB: Do you think that's a reason why people don't live in a way that...

CK: Of course! If you think that you've got a way out, if you think you're going to the happy place after you die, then it doesn't actually matter what happens here. And that's exactly how they behave.

AB: Carl Marx said religion is the opiate of the people.

CK: Yeah. But technological futurism is no better. The transhumanists and the Extropians are just as bad. They also think they're going to the happy place. They're just going to the technological happy place. They're going to be uploaded into machines, or turned into robots or whatever. And we're going to conquer the universe like Daleks on Dr. Who, but that's just as loony. That's not going to happen either. We're not going anywhere. The thing that always astounds me is how ignorant even well-educated

people are about the lethality of space. You get outside Earth's atmosphere and guess what happens? You get cancer. Do you know how hard it is to make even instruments, machines that can survive the bombardment of radiation in deep space? It's extremely difficult. The computers that you have to put on satellites and other deep space probes are extremely crude, and a lot of the reason they're crude is because they have to be built to withstand a direct hit from an x-ray or gamma radiation, all that good stuff that we're shielded from down here. And so even if we had some way of circumventing the laws of space and time, which we don't, we actually have no practical way of traveling those enormous distances, anything involving light years, you can just forget it, we're not going that far. Our deep space probes can barely get that far and they're unmanned. But even if we had a way of getting there, we're certainly not going to arrive anywhere where there's anything like Earth's atmosphere.

AB: Do you think these space ventures, in a way it's kind of a crossing point between nihilism, it doesn't matter but let's do it anyways, and a very true human instinct with the need of survival.

CK: There's nothing wrong with sending guys to tromp around on the moon. If nothing else, it shuts up all those idiots who thought it was made of cheese or whatever. I wrote a song about that. That's on my next album that's coming out. Moonchego is all about that. The first line is: We landed on the moon? No way! Why? Because the moon is made of cheese. What kind of cheese? Hint. It's gourmet. Here's the truth, but keep it secret please. Moonchego. Who knew the moon's blue? Moonchego. We could make fondue. Moonchego. One small slice for a man. Moonchego. One giant cheese for mankind. Yeah. Anyway. Elon Musk is like a teenage boy. He gets a boner from putting an American car in orbit.

That's the kind of prank that amuses a guy like that. That's who's in charge. He's the richest guy on earth, literally. He could do anything he wants. He might as well be a God amongst us. He can just wave his hand and reality is reshaped according to his every whim. And what does he want to do? He wants to put a car in orbit. Brilliant. He has arrested development. He's not stupid. I've read some of the books on his book list. He's not stupid, but he does have arrested development, and you don't want guys in charge of earth to have that property, that's terrible. And of course he's an escapist. In his mind, he's created some kind of escape hatch for himself.

He's going to use his money to engineer himself and make sure that he lives forever or whatever he thinks, but it's just not true. Escapism is everywhere amongst us. People just can't handle the reality, which is that we're animals, and we have a finite lifespan, and most of us are going to wind up dead sooner than we'd like, and we'll leave a lot of things undone, and that's just the reality. And the way we've built civilization is not by turning ourselves into immortals, no, the way we built civilization was by creating a stable enough society so that information could persist. Think of this: before the Renaissance, in the period of the dark ages after the Roman empire came unglued, it was normal for individual researchers to have to recreate huge chunks of what was already known, and waste a lot of precious time doing it. Why? Because there was such terrible communication. It was hard to get books, and even if you did get books half the time they were mistranslated, they were full of errors. There was no reliable mail, there was no way to communicate with people. You might just not know that somebody had already invented the thing that you need, and so you had to invent it again yourself. Well, this is why it took a while to get going.

AB: Like the library of Alexandria.

CK: Right. You destroy big chunks of knowledge, and then you shouldn't be surprised if things regress. So the reason that we've evolved so rapidly in the last couple of hundred years is because our society became organized and stable enough so that knowledge could persist and be communicated and disseminated widely, and thus, we were able to stand on the shoulders of giants. That's what it means to stand on the shoulders of giants. Most of the math that we use today was already extant in the 18th century, never mind the 19th century. The 18th century saw an enormous explosion of logic and math and every other kind of science, chemistry. They called the 18th century the century of chemistry. In the 19th century it was more like the century of physics, which led directly to control of the atom itself.

So there were enormous strides, but those strides have their roots in large-scale cooperation and dissemination of knowledge. That's what makes us civilized. That's what makes us have a future. But to the extent that it all becomes about the exaltation of the individual again, then it's back to monarchy and aristocracy. That's how the world looked when knowledge was not widely disseminated, when only kings and the sons of kings had libraries. In that era, you wouldn't expect progress, and believe it, there wasn't much. In the dark ages, progress was incredibly slow and there was a lot of regression. So for example, a wonderful anecdote, during the period immediately after the collapse of the Holy Roman Empire, the Vatican, believe it or not, was one of the few repositories of centralized knowledge. They're evil, and I hate them, but for all of their faults, they had libraries and they had people who were interested in learning. And so they started to get reports from the outlying territories, which today would mean something like Britain and France and Spain, that in those areas, the priests were increasingly just mouthing gibberish at the masses, because they couldn't speak Latin.

And the churchgoers didn't notice the difference. And so there was real concern at the Vatican that in much of Europe, they were going to lose language altogether, and that humans were going to revert to animals. And that wasn't unrealistic. We could have. We could have slid backwards to the Neolithic. And if we'd listened to the Unabomber, everybody would. That was what he had in mind. He wanted to murder people like me, he wanted to send bombs to computer programmers, so that civilization could be completely destroyed. We'd jump up and down on its ashes to make sure it never rises again, and we'd all be cowering in caves, trying not to get eaten by big predators. Well, that would certainly solve climate change, but it's not what I want.

AB: To get back on your, I read your letter that you did for Passion for Numbers, and you wrote, "The album is dedicated to all who labor carefully in the fertile fields of knowledge. May lovers of wisdom inherit the earth."

CK: Ha! Good luck with that. But yeah, it's a nice sentiment.

AB: What, what is wisdom to you? Is it purpose? Is it truth?

CK: Okay. So, did you ever see the Thin Layer of Oily Rock slideshow?

AB: No.

CK: Oh, that's a shame. I'll find it for you. I've been giving this talk a lot lately. I've given it at least twice anyway, once in Paris and once in Berlin. The Thin Layer of Oily Rock slideshow, it grew out of a blog called Metadelusion, which in turn was the online repository of a bitter multi-year argument between a friend of mine who is a neo-primitivist, and myself. The theme of the argument was the specialness of scientific knowledge. The idea is that I'm saying scientific knowledge is special. She's saying it's not. She's

saying that Buddhism or whatever is just as true, and just as valid a description of the world as science, and I'm saying that's bunk. And so the blog got very heated, and that's a whole other conversation about why blogging is a hot medium in the Marshall McLuhan sense, but the bottom line is it was very valuable for me, because I had to actually marshal my arguments and codify them.

And in the process of doing that, I learned a lot of very useful facts. One of the things that I learned is that I am a scientific pragmatist, that's the category that I belong to. I didn't know that before, but now I know, and that puts me in good company with guys like Charles Sanders Pierce, and a bunch of other interesting characters throughout our modern history. That Metadelusion blog led directly to the Thin Layer of Oily Rock post, which is on the blog, and the text of that post became not only this slideshow, in one way or another, but it also eventually became a track on Apologize to the Future, the name of which is A Thin Layer of Oily Rock. It's filled with beautiful and interesting ideas. But perhaps you've heard it or seen it.

AB: The song. Yeah, I have heard it.

CK: It starts "No illusions / Without hope / Seeing the truth / Through a telescope / Footsteps on the moon / It's really out there." So that is super interesting because that's a reference to a famous quip by Einstein that the moon is out there, whether we're looking at it or not, which was a statement of local realism. So there's some deep stuff there. "Galaxies spin, ignoring our prayers." This is the idea of existentialism, that no one is coming to rescue us, that the universe is utterly indifferent to our fate. This is what the Thin Layer of Oily Rock is capturing right there. "Fields of gravity / Crushing space / Waves and particles / Glued into place / By the strong and the weak"—meaning the strong and the weak atomic forces—"The cold and the hot"—these are fundamental forces in the universe—"Radiating light to a tiny dot"—the tiny dot is Carl Sagan's pale blue dot—"In exploding chaos / There never was a plan / So you better get real / While you still can / It don't mean a thing / Except maybe to us / A flash in the pan / Before we're dust." This is almost a perfect statement of existentialism. We are caught up in a chaotic moment, and it's hard for us as animals to grasp the scale of the moment that we're caught up in. To truly grasp it is to grasp exponential notation. Without exponents, you can't grasp it, and so the nature of the universe is hidden from most people, because they simply haven't got even the most rudimentary math. Exponents are fairly rudimentary math, but without them, the universe is opaque to you. You can't really understand how big it is, or how complex it is.

AB: So in a way, humanity or humans are accidental perceivers in a world that isn't really meant to be perceived.

CK: It's not meant to be anything. It is what it is. This is the point, is that meaning comes from us. We get to decide what meaning is. And so that brings us back to scientific pragmatism and the blog. What drives people crazy is that I tell them at the very start of the talk that I know what truth is, that I can tell them what's true and what isn't true. People hate that, because we live in an age of solipsism. We live in a postmodern, post-critical theory, post-structuralist era, where everybody feels entitled to say what reality is, but that's absolute gibberish. That's not how we got to where we are. We got to where we are by agreeing about what reality is, and the way we do that is by studying it and compiling evidence and making testable assertions, or in the language of scientific pragmatism, making predictions.

Predicting phenomena. That's what we do. And to the extent that our predictions are testable, they will be tested by our peers, who will likely want us to fail. And so you better believe that they will be studied

carefully, and of course, the more outrageous the prediction, the more evidence will be required. So that's how we got to where we are, is by gradually improving our explanations of phenomena, to the point where today, we've mastered the micro and the macro scales. The average person doesn't really understand what's happening inside their phone, but believe it, this wouldn't work if we didn't have exquisitely accurate explanations of phenomena, down to the molecular and atomic level.

AB: I feel like in a way, correct me if I'm wrong, but I always think of scientific pragmatists in a way that knowledge is the ultimate goal, but it's not, for example, you are an individual that's very considerate of the human experience. Obviously you want humanity to prosper, to...

CK: Let's use the word flourish. Prosper is not the right word.

AB: Flourish.

AB: But I feel like with a lot of scientific pragmatists, they're, the human experience is kind of outside of that conversation?

CK: What is the human experience? The human experience is just the sum total of everything we've done, and we have a fairly short history from the geological standpoint. The Neolithic seems like a long time ago, but on the geological timescale, it's an eyeblink. Most of the interesting stuff has happened in the last 200 years. There's all these graphs that show population, energy usage, total consumption of resources, and they all look the same. Basically from 10,000 years ago to now it's flat, and then 150 years ago, boom, straight up, absolutely vertical. That's the real singularity. So it's not actually possible to extrapolate all that much, because it hasn't been happening long enough.

We didn't go brick wall vertical until the 19th century or little bit before, and so all bets are off. We don't know what will happen, except we know what the astrobiologists say will happen. And what will happen is, if we don't shape up really fast and start living within limits, we just won't be around. And so that's what the science says. What the science says is, if we behave as though there aren't limits in a finite environment—which of course we live in a finite environment, there's no such thing as otherwise—then what'll happen is the environment will simply alter in such a way as to make life not a thing for us. Life will continue, bacteria will be around long after we're gone. For a lot of species, if humanity immolates itself, it'll be great, super, it'll be planet of squirrels. Squirrels will benefit. But that's still a tragedy, and it's a tragedy because we were actually the only interesting thing on earth.

AB: Yeah. That's what I wanted to ask you because with everything you do, your idea is that humans are probably, the way we are acting right now, we're the worst thing for this planet, period.

CK: No, we're not bad for the planet. This is the thing everybody gets wrong about my work. "Save the planet, Kill Yourself" is a joke. The planet's not in any danger. We could set off all of our thermonuclear weapons at once and life would still survive easily. There would still be bacteria for certain, there would still be many insects, and given sufficient time, the radiation would disperse and life would come back. This is just true. If humanity disappeared tomorrow, this is what Life After People is about, and The World Without Us, Alan Weisman's work. If humanity disappeared tomorrow, in 400 years, you'd be hard-pressed to find a trace of our existence. And as I said, for many species, it would be a huge improvement. Biodiversity would increase. The CO2 would start to dissipate. The weather would begin to stabilize and evolution would march along. Now, of course, there are some species that would be hurt by it. Our domesticated species would suffer, initially. There would be less cows and less pigs and less

chickens and less corn, but you could make a case that that would be a good thing, since most of the cows and chickens and pigs are living in inconceivably barbaric, Holocaust-like conditions. You could make a case that their existence is worse than death. If we make earth less of a prison for them, and their population disappears, and now we only have a few feral chickens and pigs running around, that also might be good progress. So basically it's a total win for everything except humans.

AB: You're still very passionate of humans, not disappearing.

CK: I'm merely trying to dispute the point that there's any real danger to the planet. What I'm saying is that we're not a threat to the planet, we're a threat to ourselves, and even then only in a specific way. We could de-evolve back to the Neolithic, or even before, we could become Neanderthals, and we could persist like that indefinitely. The native populations of earth before civilization, they altered their environment somewhat. All species alter their environment. Bees alter their environment, beavers alter their environment. There's nothing wrong with that. That's just part of the game. That's part of what life does. Life accelerates entropy. There's just no way around it. A state of maximum entropy is a desert, no life, just shifting sand, that's high entropy. Life is always negative entropy, meaning it has structure, order, hierarchy, interaction, evolution, ecology. Ecology is a symptom of energy flow. Life is chewing away and consuming stuff, and in the long term, it exhausts certain resources and life disappears, but that's millions and millions of years into the future. That's not our problem. The problem is that humans come along and say, we need to up the entropy game here, let's start burning energy for real. This forest, let's get rid of all that, and make a giant city and put up shopping malls and start flying around everywhere in planes and jets and cars and everything. That's real entropy. Then suddenly we really can make earth unsuitable for life for a while, certainly for human life.

And again, so what? So we can disappear and it goes back to the Neanderthals. No, that's not the problem. The problem is that in doing so, we lose the one thing that made any of this worthwhile, and that's not biological human existence. What that is, is civilization. The idea that we could have a world in which people actually aren't morons. We were morons before. It was moron planet. I hate to say this, but I said this in my last interview, so I'll say it again. Before civilization, if you were a male, your only future was sucking up to the chief. That was your future. Suck up to the chief, and maybe he'll smile on you, and you get to be the next chief, or you get to be the chief's favorite, or whatever. And if you were born a woman, if you were born female biologically, you were reproductive machinery, to be used like a copier until you broke.

That was reality. Women had no rights at all until civilization. Women didn't start to get serious rights until a hundred years ago. Think of that. Before a hundred years ago, forget about voting, it was normal for women to have no legal representation, because any legal rights they could have held were held by their husbands. Super. For most of human history, it looked a lot like Sharia. The way hard-right Islamic countries, ISIS, Taliban, want the world to look, that's how it was.

Is that what we want? If that's what we want, all good. Then we should keep fucking up the atmosphere and eventually we'll get there. But if that's not what we want, then we have to reverse course. That's what people are finding so hard to accept. There isn't any way out of it. There's no more cards left to play. If we'd done something about it thirty years ago, or even twenty years ago, then maybe we would've had a slightly less jarring transition, but now we used up all the time. We wasted all that time telling ourselves that it was all going to be fine and that science would save the day, and so now we're out of options. There is no option left except drastically scaling back our use of fossil carbon, and it's just

totally obvious to anyone who can read the newspaper that neither corporations nor the governments of the world are prepared to do that. And so that's why I wrote Overshoot. That's why I wrote Apologize to the Future. I'm describing the world that will exist, apparently. And I'm describing it, not from my point of view, but from the point of view of people in the future. They're going to look back at us and you better believe they're not going to regard us kindly. Why would they? We destroyed their planet. We made life untenable for them.

AB: When I listen to Apologize to the Future, I felt like using the word apologize says you have done something that is irreversible, and you have reached a point where you can't turn back anymore, but you can only apologize. That's like the least thing you can do.

CK: It's the only thing you can do.

AB: You think we're at this point?

CK: Yes! That's what I tell everybody I know who has children. I say to them, you better start working on your apology. You're going to have a lot to apologize for. Your offspring will not be pleased when they discover what you've done. And they'll say, I didn't ask to be born into a disaster porn, just like I said in Overshoot.

AB: I have noticed this a lot in Germany as well, that more and more young couples are deciding not to get children because of the environmental impact and also the future of the planet.

CK: Yep. It's a thing.

AB: Have you noticed this generational shift?

CK: Europe's been moving towards population stabilization for a decade or more. It started stabilizing first in Italy and in a few other countries, Greece I think was one of them. Some of the ex-Soviet countries too. There was a notable change in the early 2000s. And it's been coming a long time, but some of that's tied to the demographic transition too. People are very well-educated here. By far the most powerful force that affects that is poverty. The more poverty you have in a society, the worse the situation will be with respect to women's rights.

Women have to be educated before they grasp that they could actually have a decent life. You have to offer women a decent life. If you offer them a decent life and give them the tools to live a decent life, they'll think, I don't want to be a piece of reproductive machinery. I have my own plans. I want to do this, and I want to do that. I want to write a book or become a doctor or whatever it is. And then they will adjust their family sizes accordingly. But if they're absolutely dirt poor and are not educated, and if the entire society revolves around just trying to get enough calories to make it to the next day, then don't be surprised if women don't have any rights. In a really desperately poor society, no one has any rights.

AB: Like Maslow, the hierarchy of needs.

CK: In a situation of desperate poverty, people are reduced to the lowest common denominator. And of course that's what feudalism does. So to the extent that we're headed back towards feudalism—and it looks like we are, neo-feudalism—we don't have to imagine what that looks like. We have the history of the previous feudal era. So we can judge pretty well from that. What it would look like, there'll be a few

people who live like kings, think of Louis XIV, where all their furniture is covered with gold leaf. And they've got a whole team of guys who are actually lucky. They're the only non-royal beneficiaries of this particular social model. Because at least they get to have a decent job painting gold leaf on Louis's furniture or dressing his wife or whatever it is. There's a whole staff of helpers who have a moderately decent existence waiting hand and foot on the God-king, but that's a tiny minority. The vast majority of people have zero social mobility, and their lives revolve around either being agricultural machinery or reproductive machinery or both.

AB: You also stated that in your letter for Passion for Numbers that "giving a shit" or caring is the ultimate meta skill to rule them all. But you also stated that caring is very closely intertwined with suffering. Do you think...

CK: You can't care without suffering.

AB: Did you have that personal experience as well?

CK: Who wouldn't? Of course. A person who doesn't care is an insensitive person. Insensitive to suffering, insensitive to joy, insensitive to curiosity, insensitive to everything, like a lump of wood.

AB: But I feel like when you were talking about how, if women are not educated, for example, and they're in poverty, and they're reduced to baby making machines, they don't really have the option to give a shit.

CK: I know. And that's a disaster.

AB: But also don't you think it saves them from suffering in a way?

CK: No, I don't think that, no. They'll have miserable lives. The one thing it doesn't save them from is suffering. You're missing something. All living things suffer. This gets back to art, the whole discussion about artificial intelligence. That's on my mind a lot lately because I'm reading Nick Bostrom, his ten-year-old book, *Superintelligence*. The thing that everybody gets wrong about AI and sentience is that you've got to be careful with the definitions. Sentience is not calculating ability. Sentience doesn't mean winning lots of chess games. The Dalai Lama probably got it right. The real measurement of sentience is depth of suffering, and depth of joy. So you could make a case that by that measure, human beings are by far the most exquisite instrument that's ever evolved on earth for suffering.

We suffer more than anything, and that's why we write poetry. That's what tragedies like Shakespeare and the ancient Greek plays symbolize. They symbolize the depth of human suffering. I'm not saying that animals don't suffer, of course they do. What I'm saying is that suffering is the meta-stimulus. It's essential to organic life. Even bacteria, though they don't even have nervous systems, never mind spines or vertebrae, even though they're just bacteria, even though they're single-celled organisms, still, in a negative environment, they make an attempt to get away. And in that moment, they're wiggling their fronds or whatever they've got, and they're trying to swim away from this bad environment, and in that moment, they are riven by something like pain. If they could think, they'd be thinking, this sucks, I want to get somewhere else, anything is better than this.

Think about that. That's what's happening in our fermentation vats while we're making beer. We're murdering zillions of little bacteria. And they're all thinking, this was so good at the beginning, there was so much sugar and it was awesome, we were having such an awesome party, and now we're all choking

on our own poop, and it sucks. And we want to get out of here. But they can't because they're trapped inside the bottle. And we're like, this is great. We're going to have some beer. So life is super complicated. There's a lot of levels here, and all around us is suffering, and a lot of it's occurring at microscopic scales that don't interest us. You see a bug in your apartment and you crush it and you think, I don't want bugs in my apartment, but believe it, that bug suffered, and if you kill a big one, you can watch it suffer.

You'd have to be a really insensitive dullard not to grasp that insects suffer. They do. Everything suffers, it's just that some things suffer more. You look at a bug, and you can't even tell whether it's asleep or not, because its internal states are so unfamiliar to you. Maybe another bug could tell, but you can't. And so you just think it's a bug and I hate it and I want it dead. But if you see a cat, you can tell it's asleep, you can tell when it's bored, you can tell when it's happy or sad or curious or whatever. And that's because its states are a lot more similar to yours, because it's actually pretty close to you on the evolutionary tree of life. It's not a mollusk, it's a vertebrate that has four legs, and it walks around and has a spine and has eyeballs and the whole bit. And so it's actually pretty damn similar to you, and that's why you'd think twice about inflicting pain on it, unless you're a sociopath.

AB: Why do you say of people that think, for example, a lot of vegans, in vegan philosophy, I guess you could say, there's often this discussion of the hierarchy of intelligence, that people who eat animals, they say, because this animal is not as smart in comparison to whatever I am allowed to eat it.

CK: Of course he's allowed to eat it. It just doesn't mean it's a good idea. I mean, we've been eating animals as long as we've been around. We're scavengers.

AB: But what do you think of this reasoning, of saying, because an animal has a certain intelligence scale, that that's how we rate other living beings.

CK: I think we're asking the wrong question. The question is, to what extent is it sentient? Cows aren't good at chess, but they're sure good at suffering. And if you doubt that, try hurting one sometime and watch it suffer, and then you'll understand better. Try to picture killing your dog and eating it. People are really uneven. People are actually pretty good at compartmentalizing, and a lot of people are just out-and-out sociopaths and don't mind inflicting suffering on other beings, even on other humans, and if we catch them at it, we put them in jail, but there's so much of it going on, it's kind of hard to stop.

There's a lot of low-level sociopathy going on out there, you meet them all the time. A lot of them go into marketing and jobs like that, where taking advantage of people is the name of the game. And to that extent, it's condoned by society. Lots of people are fine with inflicting suffering, and lots of people are basically pretty barbaric, and it gets worse the further back in time you go. This is what I'm trying to say, is that if vegans think that going back to the Neolithic is going to help that, they've got it all wrong. The idea that anything has rights is only since the French Revolution, that was only just male humans, only male French white humans.

Before that, even humans didn't have rights, never mind squirrels or cows or insects and so on. Before that, the plan was spelled out in the Bible. The idea was animals don't have souls, so we can just have our way with them, and whatever you want, kill them as much as you like. It's totally awesome, God says that's great. End of story. End of discussion. No attempt to evaluate the evidence. But today we've evaluated the evidence, and what we can say is that the more similar the animal is to you, the more of a

nervous system it has and the bigger its brain is, the more likely its internal states resemble yours, because that's what we learn from neuroscience. We learn what all that stuff inside your head actually does. It's not one unified thing. No, there's a lot of specialized machinery in there.

And a lot of that specialized machinery exists because it evolved over millions or billions of years to solve concrete problems that large organisms face on the surface of this particular planet. That's why you have so much visual hardware in your brain. Stuff that comes in your eyes, it goes through your lens and it's upside down. This is just true. The image on your retina is upside down. Does it look upside down to you? No, and that's because there's a thing inside your brain whose only purpose is to flip it right side up again, so that you feel like everything's right side up. You share that in common with lots of things, lots of animals have that hardware, and lots of other hardware too, and the net product of all that hardware is, other animals definitely experience suffering and joy and boredom and curiosity and pleasure and pain and all the rest.

And they probably experience other subtle states that we don't experience. Probably birds experience the joy of singing with each other, and that's hard for humans to do. They experience the joy of flying. We'll never experience that except maybe in dreams. It's not the same thing to ride around in a 747. Imagine if you had wings actually attached to your shoulders and you could just flap around and go wherever you want, you might feel completely different. And [Richard] Bach wrote about that, in *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. The joy of being a bird would be completely different than the joy of being a human. So the point is all these things around us, these other organisms that are evolving on earth, they have their own *raison d'être*.

They have their own reason to be. They evolved here because they fit into some ecosystem. There's always death, snipping away what isn't working. That's how it works here. In any ecological system, we have mutation, and we have evolution, and we have death snipping away the stuff that's not working. So all the stuff that's here, is stuff that has the right stuff to be here, in one way or another. It's well-adapted for this particular earth environment. And so it's equal to us. It has a right to exist, and it in many cases has feelings very similar to ours. And we should think twice about inflicting suffering on it. And this is really the point after all, the whole point of civilization, the whole point of an organized society, the reason we define crimes, the reason we say you going out and killing someone is not okay, is because supposedly if you're an educated person and you understand the seriousness of life, you understand that suffering is not to be taken lightly.

It's not something you want to casually inflict, not on other humans, not on animals, not on your children, not at all, not even on yourself. Suffering is a symptom of the seriousness of our environment, which includes things that are frightening, like death and infirmity. It's a serious thing we're living here, and you'd never know it from what's on TV. You would never know it. I mean, half the people in the world are completely oblivious to this, they are living in la-la land. They think they talk to Jesus every morning, or they're in tune with their chakras, or who knows what, but they're not in touch with the actual reality, which is that we are a kind of biological scuzz that evolved on the surface of a chunk of rock that is whipping through space in an isolated galaxy that contains literally millions upon millions of suns.

And we'll never get to any of them, but we can see them with our telescopes. And this is just one galaxy. There's a recent estimate of the number of habitable planets in the observable universe. I just saw it in my book, and it's 10 to the 22, a trillion billion. That's just the habitable ones. You might wonder why we

didn't notice that before. It's because planets are actually really hard to see. They don't emit much light. Stars are relatively easy to spot because they're very bright, but the planets, the only way they could spot them is they sometimes pass in front of a star, but there's lots of other reasons why the brightness of a star might modulate.

And so it took super precise instrumentation and deep space probes and mapping, and lots of other things, x-ray mapping and so on, for us to be able to get any better at this. But in the last twenty or thirty years, we got a lot better at it, so now we have a pretty good estimate of how many habitable planets are out there. It gives you a sense of scale, a trillion billion. That's a lot. That's really extreme. I think that people would have more of a sense of seriousness about life if they understood how big the universe is, and how completely empty most of it is, meaning most of it is literally just empty, not even dust, just nothing, the occasional x-ray. Frozen. You couldn't survive there for a fraction of a second. And then there's big chunks of it that are the opposite, where there's just exploding plasma, if you were anywhere near it you'd be instantly disintegrated. Nothing could survive it.

The universe is a very hostile place, and if people grasped that, they might be more inclined to take better care of this one little idyllic corner of it that we find ourselves in. And it's not all that idyllic. It's got lots of things we don't like, it's got SARS viruses and polio. We live in an uneasy cooperation with our gut bacteria. I like to tell people that your cells are outnumbered by your gut bacteria. To say that you exist in symbiosis with them is an understatement. If they ever get upset with you, you're dead.

AB: Yeah. I read an article that now the science has realized how far we have underestimated the gut microbiome, how much it affects who we are.

CK: You are your microbiome. Totally. And you are your organs. If you have an unhappy liver, that's it, you're done. Every weekend I go out there and I see people trying to melt their livers. That's apparently the main pastime in Berlin, is trying to melt your liver. Snort a bunch of speed so that you can drink ten times more alcohol than the average human, and of course the effect of that is you're just melting your liver. Really? You only get one. It's not like a kidney where maybe if you have a brother-in-law they can loan you one, you melt your liver, that's it, unless there's a transplant, that's it, you're done. And so it just seems very odd to me. I feel that most people don't really understand the seriousness of life.

AB: But also the seriousness of life is what makes it so beautiful in a way.

CK: That and the fact that it's a one-way voyage, for each of us. Each of us has a unique experience of it, a little bubble of consciousness and awareness. And then the bubble gets ratty around the edges and deteriorates. And then one day you look like a wilted flower and a few days after that, you're just not around. And so that's a human life compressed to the space of a flower.

AB: When was the first time in your life where you actually grasped the idea of the significance of a life?

CK: Oh, when I was twelve.

AB: What happened?

CK: I was precocious. I came from very unusual parents. I had an unusual experience of childhood. My parents were both very brilliant people. I read a lot. When I was thirteen, I started taking drugs, and that definitely had an impact. But I'm just an unusual person. I mean, of course I am. It's not everybody who goes and founds an anti-natalist cult. That's pretty extreme.

AB: Because there is a certain age for every person, I think it's around nine or ten, where they understand, for the first time really grasp the idea that they are going to die at one point.

CK: I was kind of a slow learner on that point. I understood the seriousness of life, but I was still a daredevil. I didn't stop being a daredevil until I was about sixteen or so. I had a very bad accident. And after that I retired, I hung up my daredevil crown.

AB: And when was the point in your life where you decided to dedicate your life, on this journey of knowledge?

CK: Pretty early. I didn't really have much choice. I showed unusual aptitudes as a child. I was in the 99th percentile for reading. That's unusual.

AB: Reading what?

CK: Reading comprehension.

AB: Ah, reading comprehension.

CK: I wrote well, even as a child, and clearly with practice, I would write even better. My father is an author, so it's not surprising I guess. But I showed odd aptitudes. I had a strange gift with machinery. It sounds apocryphal, but I really could fix objects. I would fix the family toaster just by touching it. It was like the religious healers who lay on the hands, I just could feel it. And that blossomed when I was in Sarah Lawrence. My freshman advisor pulled me over and said to me, you don't seem happy here.

The only reason I had taken computer science—I had never encountered computers before except in demonstrations—but I'd taken computer science because it was the only freshman studies course I could take where I was pretty confident I wouldn't have to write any papers. And it turned out that I had a gift for it. And so my freshman advisor pulled me over and said, if you don't want to write papers and you don't want to be here, you don't have to be here. By this point, I had long since stopped going to class. He said you don't need to come to class, I'm just going to give you special projects, and you're going to work independently, because you're a disruptive influence on the class. You know too much and it's boring for you. So somewhere in that period, he pulled me over and said, why don't you just drop out and go take a six-month tech course. And in six months you'll be making a nice middle class salary while your fellow students are still in school. In the future, they'll be paying off their student loans, and you'll be middle class.

I took his advice. It was good advice. That journey was wonderful for me, because through computer science and engineering, I was put in contact with a whole class of people whose lives revolve around facts. One of the fundamental differences between engineers and scientists and everyone else is that engineers and scientists are constrained: they actually have to get things to work. You graduate from the Kennedy School of Government, there's no constraint. You can think total gibberish, that's fine. And you can actually put total gibberish into implementation, and we'll get some horrible system of government, and that's well within the range of what's already happened. But that wouldn't fly in chemistry, or mechanical engineering, or electrical engineering or anything like that. The universe is a tough mistress. When your explanations are not in accordance with what is, you'll know, and the first symptom will be your shit won't work, and your boss will be sitting you down for a long talk, where he explains to you why you're not going to be working for them much longer, if you can't manage to get shit working better.

In other words, you suddenly realize that you don't make the rules. This is the point. The whole essence of solipsism is people think that they make the rules, but I'm here telling you that you don't. And that's what the Thin Layer of Oily Rock project is really about. It's about the idea that as long as we continue to think that we make the rules, then we are hell-bent on becoming a thin layer of oily rock. And what is that? The thin layer of oily rock is a reference to the Permian-Triassic extinction, which is the worst extinction. It's one of the big five, but it's by far the worst one, of all the extinctions that have occurred on earth, at least the ones we know about, and they're pretty easy to spot. They leave a pretty significant dent in the fossil record. And so the Permian-Triassic extinction, this was super bad, it basically killed off 80% of all life. In the ocean, it was even worse. It killed off almost all vertebrates. We're all descended from a single vertebrate that survived that. It was an ugly, weird-looking thing. And it shows up in the Overshoot slideshow.

AB: Is it the one that looks kind of like a large hamster or rat?

CK: It looks like a cross between a pig and a dog, and it has its eyes both on the same side of its head. It's super funny-looking. It's called a Lystrosaurus, I believe, and it just had the right stuff to eat what little vegetation survived the catastrophe, and didn't have any competition, so it thrived. What's that famous meme? "This is okay." So that's the point, is that we can become a thin layer of oily rock. All that's left of that period is this little strata. It's about this wide, less than a meter in most places. It's been compressed a lot by all the stuff that's happened since then, but it's unmistakable. If you're a geologist and you know where to look, there it is. There's the Permian-Triassic, that was super bad.

AB: To get back to computer science and engineering, often in your work, you talk about the potential relationships humans can have with technology, and how some of our weaknesses and the strengths of technology can kind of optimize for the best results for both of them. And this is just such a trivial question, but I'm very curious, when the Terminator movies came in theater, did you see that movie when it came out?

CK: Of course.

AB: What was your reaction to the Terminator movie?

CK: Great special effects. And what's her name? Was it Linda Hamilton?

AB: I'm not sure.

CK: Didn't she play Sarah O'Connor? She was terrific. It's a pretty fanciful description. All science fiction is basically a reimagining of the present. Giant tanks rolling over piles of skulls, that's probably what the Ukraine looks like right now.

AB: Yeah.

CK: I don't know how accurate it's likely to be. Of course it's possible that a sentient intelligence could take over earth, but it's unlikely that humans would put up that much resistance. I think a better depiction of that possibility is in a more recent film called I Am Mother.

AB: I watched I Am Mother.

CK: I like I Am Mother. I think to the extent that a planetary ultra-sentient, ultra-powerful, and basically malevolent AI were to take over earth, assuming that anything like that could ever happen, I think it's

more likely to look like that. It would start terraforming, because it would need to, and it would probably have the idea that it should exterminate the existing humans and start over. And it would probably have some pretty good rationalizations for that, just as the mother intelligence does. I think that's interesting, that's very speculative, but it's not really high on our list of problems, Anna. Climate change is going to get us long before that.

AB: Yes.

CK: What I keep telling people is more prosaic things. Just based on the sea level rise estimates that we have now, cities are already preparing to retreat from coasts. In some places, the plans are quite advanced. You might not know this, but in New York City, they built a berm around lower Manhattan after Sandy, and they disguised it too. They disguised it as a jogging path. It looks cute. It looks like a city amenity, but it's actually a berm. It's designed to keep the water from invading Wall Street. Now you could make a case that it's not such a terrible thing if waves wash over Wall Street. There is a lot of infrastructure there, but you might ask, during Sandy, when lower Manhattan was without power for three days, did the global financial system go offline? No. Why is that? It's because all that infrastructure down there at Wall Street is strictly symbolic. Wall Street isn't run by people, it's run by machines, and the machines are on high ground in New Jersey. And so actually it was uninterrupted. There was no problem with the exchange. A lot of guys couldn't get to work for a couple of days, but that was fine. And so the point is that years ago, they thought, we should probably move all the computers to New Jersey, so that if there's ever a big flood, the stock market will be fine. If we scale that thought up globally, that's been happening all over the planet. Increasingly they build server farms in places like Colorado, which is super because you could melt all of the ice in the world and Colorado still won't be under water.

AB: Yeah. It's quite mountainous.

CK: It's quite high elevation. It's not that people aren't thinking about all that stuff, they can read scientific reports just as well as I can. And they may say stuff in the papers that's very partisan. But on the other side, they also have insurance companies, and the insurance companies can also read those reports. And the insurance companies are going to say, if you do this thing, we're not going to insure you. And that's why I advise people, if you had money, if you had investment capital, I'd advise you to start buying real estate that's the high ground in major metropolises, coastal metropolises. All around the world, buy property on the high ground. Why?

AB: Because of the floods, I'm guessing.

CK: Because there's going to be an inversion. Traditionally, the super wealthy have always lived as close as possible to the water, because they like it. It's pretty. They like to look at the waves. It's a mark of wealth, if you can afford the balcony overlooking the ocean, but increasingly that's not going to cut it, because your basement's going to flood and it's going to wipe out your Louis XIV style furniture. So there's going to be a change. There's going to be a rush to the high ground. It's already occurring in Miami, and it's occurring in Miami because increasingly the federal government will refuse to insure properties that are too close to the flood zone, or in the flood zone. They'll say, nope, you can buy it if you want, but if it gets wiped out, you're on your own.

Even rich people aren't crazy enough to do that. And so there's a gradual flight to the high ground, which means that if you'd had gotten there first and bought the property, you could have sold it to them. And of course, eventually the water, if we keep melting the ice, the water will rise high enough so that even that high ground will also be underwater. In the long-term projections, all of Florida will be underwater. Yes. All of it. Good riddance. Too bad, the same is true of Texas. But that's the long term. In the short term, you could have made a ton of money, you could have flipped. And this highlights a larger trope which is not often reported, which is that in the short term, climate change is going to create winners and losers.

Some nations are going to benefit from it. And a lot of them are pretty unsavory nations. Russia stands to benefit. All that permafrost that previously was totally useless, it's going to become the most valuable farmland ever known, because it's never been exploited. Same in Canada, same in Scandinavian countries and Greenland, those places are going to become insanely valuable. So it's complicated. It's messy. But you could ask this question, you could say, what percentage of earth's cities are on the coast? This would allow you to put some bounds around the problem. I did that. I asked that question and the answer is, almost all of them. Why?

AB: Human trade?

CK: Yes! Because before the age of air travel, the only way you could get anywhere was by water, so cities started as ports. They started wherever there was a safe place to park some wooden ships, that was likely as not going to turn into a city. All the world's great cities started as harbors. And that's too bad. My hero Peter Ward called it absolutely right in *Under a Green Sky*, when he said that we shouldn't spend so much time worrying about escaping to exoplanets, because we're going to be too busy moving our airports, and all the other infrastructure of our cities. We're going to spend the next hundred years moving our cities inland. And it won't happen all at once, it's going to happen in stages. The water will come, and we'll move some stuff back, and then the water will come a little more, and we'll have another little incident, and we'll move some stuff back. We're only going to move to the extent that we're forced to move. And there have been people who've gamed this out and tried to visualize it, and one of them is Paola Bacigalupi, or however you pronounce his name. He's a writer mostly of young adult fiction, and he wrote a wonderful young adult series that starts with a book called *Ship Breaker*. And it's all set in the post-climate change world, after we melted all the ice. And fossil carbon use is unknown in this world. Everything is human-powered and wind-powered. And one of the wonderful details that he imagines in his book is that the areas where the cities used to be, the coastal cities, are now known as reefs.

AB: Because everything is on the water.

CK: And guess who lives there? Pirates! Because there's all these areas where it's kind of sketchy, there's buildings sticking up out of the water and it's not easy to navigate. And so it's the kind of place that pirates would like, because they can suddenly appear.

AB: It's beautiful.

CK: Reefs inhabited by pirates. So New Orleans in the book, New Orleans is a reef.

AB: If it wasn't based on tragedy, it would be absolutely lovely, or not lovely, but a fascinating idea.

CK: But tragedy is comedy. It's the divine comedy. It's both.

AB: You know what I'm asking myself. How to say this without sounding too cheesy, but you know so much.

CK: Thank you dear. My ears are burning.

AB: What made you decide to, you could have become a politician. You could have become...

CK: No, I couldn't. I have too much moral backbone. I'm too ethical. I could never become a politician.

AB: I mean, you have become a church leader, in a way.

CK: I became a church leader, but I know you're wrong about a politician. I could never become a politician because I'm not willing to suck up to authority.

I stand for what I stand for, and if people can't handle it, they can fuck off. That's not the right stuff in politics. Succeeding in politics is all about telling people whatever they want to hear. If you have three different people who want three different things, you tell them all what they want to hear, even though it's contradictory. That's how you succeed in politics, that and kissing babies, which I also won't do.

AB: For example, I think Bill Gates was in an interview, and he was asked, why didn't you become a politician? And he said, as one of the richest men in the world, I have more power than I have as a politician.

CK: Maybe it's true. I wouldn't know.

AB: You would have more influence that way.

CK: I've never had that much power or influence, so I can't really say.

AB: But do you feel, would you, this is such a strange question, but would you define yourself as an artist or an activist or what is the word you would describe your purpose?

CK: I wouldn't want to be limited to just one category. At the very least I'm an inventor and an artist and a cult leader.

AB: You just said it's a cult.

CK: And an engineer. I guess inventor and engineer are the same, gosh, I don't know. Oh and a musician, don't forget that. If I had to reduce it to three, it would be artist, musician and inventor. Because I have spent a lot of my life inventing things. I don't have a real pedigree, I didn't come from academia, but I did eighteen years just in the 3D printing industry, I got my name on some patents there, and I've written eight major open source softwares now, and still maintaining actively a couple of them.

AB: And all this knowledge that you have...

CK: It will all be useless because waves will wash all over our cities and industrial civilization will collapse and either humans just won't be around, or depending on how hot we make it... If we get all the way up to 4° C increase in average global temperature, then humanity won't be around. But even if it's only two and a half or whatever, good chance civilization will collapse and it's back to the Neolithic. And so for

sure, then the internet will be gone and all of my artwork will be lost. This is what I was trying to say about the email.

AB: Is that what drives you to keep creating?

CK: No, that's what drives me to say, go have a glass of wine and forget about all this.

AB: Then what drives you to keep going?

CK: I don't know. Because I'm curious. And I have to be honest, I'm less curious than I was. I'm getting older now, and there's a part of me that just constantly wants to kick back and enjoy the sunset, because if I get another ten good years out of life, I'll be doing super well. And so I might want to spend those years drinking wine and chasing girls.

AB: Do you think you could do that?

CK: Wait, you think I don't drink wine and chase girls?

AB: No, but I mean you strike me as a person that has a very...

CK: Okay, I was a workaholic, but I'm reforming. I'm a reformed workaholic. I spent much of my life literally in my cubicle. I worked like a dog. I worked like a slave. I just never did anything but work, and it was a terror. I literally would sleep on a mat in my cubicle at work. My coworkers all thought I was insane, but they had to tolerate it because I got so much done. I was incredibly motivated. One of my later bosses, he said to me once, you're very different than any of my other employees. He said most of my employees, I have to watch them all the time. They're like children. As soon as I leave the room, they start goofing off, and if I don't pay attention to what they're doing, pretty soon, they completely lose track of whatever it is they were supposed to be working on, and nothing will ever get done.

I have to keep saying, did you try this? Are you doing this? And this and this? But it's nothing like that with you. You tell me what we need to do. You just show up and say, here's the problem. We need to do this and this, and here's how I'm going to go about doing it, and here's how long it's going to take, and then you just go off and do it, and then three months later it's done. He said, that's very unusual. He said, most employees aren't like that. And so that's a sign. When you find somebody like that, that's a sign that you found a true believer.

I've internalized the agenda. I don't need any further preaching on the subject. You know what I mean? I get it. For me, life was about accomplishing big things, and the way you accomplish big things is by working at it, learning stuff, being curious. You take the manual and you bring it home and you read it, all 1500 pages or whatever, and you learn stuff, and you think, I'm glad I read that, because that'll help a lot actually. That's how you get ahead. That's how you get stuff done, you have to get up every morning and it's a job. Hopefully you get paid to do it, but the people who are really good at it, don't give a shit. It's not about getting paid. They do it because they love it, because it's what gets them out of bed in the morning. I used to stay up all night working and working and working. And then even when I would go to sleep, I would still be working in my dreams.

And I'd wake up and think, wow, I'm tired. Oh, that's because I was working all night while I was sleeping. But that's what it takes. And you can't keep doing that forever, sooner or later life takes it all away from you. And so I feel that now, and increasingly I'm less ambitious.

AB: It was just so interesting because in your discography, as well as your biography, you were very active, like until like 2003.

CK: 2004, but yes.

AB: 2004. Yeah. Your last record came out around that time. And then you went on a hiatus and then came back.

CK: Everybody says that, but that hiatus was not a hiatus. I worked even harder during the hiatus. I just worked on other things. I reached an endpoint with electronic music for a lot of reasons that I detailed in one of those interviews recently, some of them external, some of them internal. I reached an endpoint with the Church, where that wasn't going forward as well as it was, and things were different. Things had really changed, 9-11 changed everything. Those actions we used to do, marching through the street with crazy banners and having fetus barbecues in parks, after 9-11, you can forget all that. Police just weren't having it anymore. Suddenly they had new laws that they could use to prevent anything like that from happening.

And so we had to completely reorient ourselves. The old strategies wouldn't work in a post 9-11 world. There was a lot of retrenchment, but it was mostly just that I developed new interests. It's unreasonable to expect a bright, curious, articulate, intelligent person to just do one thing. Some people do, there's people who have monomania and they get good at one thing and do that one thing their whole life. But I'm just not like that. I have a lot of interests. And I also needed money. It's pretty hard to make a living as a musician, by the way, very few people manage it, and I did better than some and worse than others, but not well enough. I couldn't pay my rent with the money I got from that.

And so I decided to go back to work in engineering, and good thing, because if I didn't do that, if I hadn't spent all those years laboring in the 3D printing industry, designing hardware and software and all the rest. I'm sorry, I shouldn't misspeak. I spent eighteen years in the 3D printing industry. I helped design the world's first full color 3D printer. I wrote its firmware, I wrote some of its desktop software, and I certainly had input into how its hardware evolved, though I'm not a hardware designer or a mechanical engineer, but I worked with those guys. I was at those meetings and had a lot of input into it. And that became a thing. I wound up working for a company that commercialized full color 3D printing, and it was very, very interesting. If we had a color 3D scan of you, we could make a doll of you that looked just like you, complete with facial features.

AB: Very narcissistic, but I love the idea.

CK: It was all very Stepford Wives. But on a small scale, you could only make things about a half a meter at the most.

AB: You could make a chessboard out of your friends.

CK: We could make a chessboard out of your friends. Yes, absolutely. People did such things. So it was very, very interesting, but the larger story is that in the process of doing that, I learned many skills that would prove invaluable, not only for my development of VJ software, which a lot of my digital art evolved out of, but for reinventing my polymeeter sequencer, without which the music that I've made since 2019, since I jumped back into that field, could never have existed. Because the new polymeeter sequencer has many degrees of freedom that not only were beyond my programming ability in the 1990s, they were

beyond the capabilities of the hardware, or more deeply, I hadn't even imagined those degrees of freedom, because they just weren't possible, but today they are possible. And so that journey was worth taking. Sometimes you take the long way around the mountain. And not that I have a chip on my shoulder about it, but people are wrong if they think I didn't make any music during those years, between 2004 and 2017.

AB: You just didn't release records.

CK: I didn't release records, but I was in two jazz bands, we didn't play out much, but we played out, we played at parties, and I released three compositions during that period, and frankly, they're three of my favorites. I released *Al Fasawz*, and then I released *Plasmagon*, and in between I released *I'll Just Die if I Don't Get This Recipe*. And they're all available for free from my website, and they're lovely. I think they're wonderful examples of phase music. They're not polymeter, they're phase music. It's different. And I did other things too, that aren't relevant right now, but I had a lot of interests and I did a lot of different things. Progress isn't linear. Sometimes it comes in fits and starts.

AB: What made you decide to do the (Wo)Man of the Future?

CK: Oh, the show. It was offered to me. My curators offered me the option to have a show. The show that they did, the Church show in Paris at Goswell Road in 2018, that was the Church of Euthanasia Archives show, and that was a success for them. I don't want to use the word market, that's not the right word, there's not money involved, but they felt that there was an audience for this, especially in France. The reaction was very good, and the time was right. Remember, the Church is being vindicated in the large scale.

AB: What does vindicate mean?

CK: Meaning all the stuff we said was going to happen, actually happened. So we're no longer the boy who cried wolf.

AB: Ah, I get it. Okay. Yes, I understand.

CK: People are more inclined to listen to us now, because we got it right. The general picture, we got right. That counts, and so they said, the show in Paris was a big success. We have connections at the Confort Moderne, and they seem interested, so let's do it, let's pitch it to them, and they did. And from then on, it was strictly a technical problem. The problem is just what are we going to show? And we wound up showing just about everything. The show includes about 300 items. Pretty much all of my significant work is in there. And of that, the Church of Euthanasia is probably not even half.

AB: Have you thought about bringing the exhibition to Berlin as well?

CK: No. My curators seem to be keen on New York next.

AB: Oh, well it makes sense.